LIBRARY
CALIFORNIA SCHOOL OF FINE ARTS

SAN FRANCISCO ART ASSOCIATION
BULLETIN

VOL. 2 MAY, 1935 No. 1

ENTRANCE TO CAVES—YUN-KANG. *Note carved lental showing honeysuckle motif.*

28

A Review of the Chinese Collection—S. F. Museum of Art

By MARIAN HARTWELL

A few awesome dramas remain to mark the inevitable cycles through which man's expression has gone.

One of these, with its intense, deliberate forms—moulded by the fusion of a tremendous, creative impulse and a compelling religion—threads its way through the fragmentary but connected exhibit of Chinese art at the San Francisco Museum of Art.

We are indebted to the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Woods Bliss of Springfield, Massachusetts; Baron Edward von der Heydt of Zandvoort, Holland; California Palace of Legion of Honor, Albert M. Bender Collection; Mr. Adolph Kohl; Mr. Mortimer C. Leventritt; and Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Walter of San Francisco, from whose collections come the rare examples of bone, jade, bronze, stone and pottery.

With the exception of a fine group of Ming

ANNE BREMER LIBRARY

porcelains, the exhibit has—even for the casual observer—a consistent character, due to an emphasis of the early, creative periods. It is difficult to make a sufficiently strict chronological grouping of such an exhibit so that the significance of its parts can be readily grasped.

In a case near the center of the gallery two fragments of bone, painted with brown geometric lines, give scant suggestion of their magic meaning—but open the drama, 1200 B. C. They were found in the district of Honan and are from the famous An-Yong group which is the "earliest inclusive group" of Chinese art yet found.

In the case with these are ceremonial articles superbly formed from thick pieces of grey and brown jade. Nearly all that remains of the Chow period, 1122-256 B. C., is suggested in these and in two supplementary cases of sacrificial or ceremonial articles in bronze. The powerfully simple contours in jade; the living though heavy forms in bronze—with their rich but repressed decoration express the purest quality of Chinese art and the permeating religion which brought them into existence. Highly prized green and brown patina cover the bronzes.

Across the gallery a huge sculptured lion in grey limestone characterizes another period. Created to be placed along the roadway to tombs of Emperors, it belongs to the grave or funerary objects which thus far comprise all that has been found from the Han Dynasty 206 B. C.-220 A. D. Its simplified masses and selected surfaces maintained by low texture display a mastery of plastic form to which the sculpture of later periods do not compare. In another position a typical slab of stone, approximately four by five feet—which perhaps once sealed the entrance to a tomb—is handsomely broken with flat bas-relief representations of mythological scenes, legends, and spirited pageantry. In these forms the freer trend of Han naturalism is seen. Fortunately, two other groups of objects reveal this period. One consists of bronze mirrors; the other of bronze belt hooks—inlaid with turquoise, silver and gold. They suggest a widened range of articles; and their fanciful animal decorations and stylized bird forms show an infusion of that mysterious, barbarian art from the Eurasian Steppe.

Across the room is a beautiful limestone chimaera (Three Kingdoms and Six Dynasties 220-580 A. D.). In it is carried on the tradition for large sculpture, but the static form of the Han period has given way to heavy rhythm which powerfully sways the mass and is quickened by moving surface patterns.

There is still exquisite poise of quiet masses in a kneeling angel of stone and in the two tiny Buddhas, Sahyamieni and Prahutaratna in gilt bronze. But the magnificent torso of a standing Bodhisattua in white marble—whose body sways and whose garments cascade in heavy patterns—shows as does the chimaera the incroaching influence of Buddhistic teachings and art forms from India.

Beautiful groups and individual pieces in stone, gilt bronze and pottery from the T'ang period, 618-906 A. D., are distributed around the gallery. Two horses and a huge hand (fragment), products of the ceramic art, display a new power in naturalism and show the fundamental change which came in Chinese art about 600 A. D. Bas-reliefs in stone and small figures in gilt bronze mingle early Chinese stylization and free Indian forms. Indian influence dominates them. Even the familiar elephant turns his head at the base of a group of figures.

With the T'ang period the exhibit practically ends which accounts for its unity of character. After the year 1000 A. D. religious art waned and with it waned the intensity of creative impulse. The new medium of expression, painting, was more that of the philosopher.

However, from the rich treasures of the Sungs, 960-1279 A. D., come two bowls. One of these has a beautiful silvery patina alternating with large masses of green glaze.

The fine group of Ming porcelains, 1368-1640, reveals the conclusion of the great drama. In them is mastery of technique, but the power which pervades the early, creative art of China is gone.

Frede Vidar Wins Scholarship

The Chaloner scholarship, awarded bi-annually to an artist under 30 years of age, has been won by Frede Vidar, Art Association member and former student of the California School of Fine Arts. It is the first time that this honor has gone to a Pacific Coast artist. It carries a prize of $2,000 a year for 3 years.

Vidar leaves the end of this month for New York. He sails in September for Europe.

Dr. Salmony to Lecture

The San Francisco Museum of Art is planning a series of seven lectures. The first, on Oriental Art, will be given by Dr. Alfred Salmony of Mills College on Friday evening, May 17th, at 8:15. Art Association members and friends are cordially invited.

This Buddhist sculpture is situated on a high cliff in the Yun-Kang caves and the photograph was obtained by the use of special equipment.

A Journey to the Caves of Yun-Kang

By JACQUES SCHNIER

(In the Mr. Adolph Kohl collection of Chinese sculpture at the San Francisco Museum of Art are two examples of carvings from the famous cave-temples at Yun-kang. In the fall of 1932 while making a study of Oriental and Indian sculpture, Jacques Schnier made a trip to the caves and the following is a brief account of the journey from his notes.)

The Mongolian winds had been blowing steadily for several days. Peking was blanketed with a fine reddish-brown dust that made it unpleasant being out of doors. Winter was rapidly approaching. As I was anxious to visit the ancient sculptured cave-temples at Yunkang to the west in Shansi Province, before leaving northern China, I took advantage of the first lull in the storm to set out, fully provisioned and in company with an American student from the college of Chinese Studies who could speak the native language.

The train was so crowded with natives and their bundles that the cars seemed to bulge. In my second-class compartment was a group of picturesque Mongolians. They were heavily

(Continued on page 5)

San Francisco Art Association Bulletin

Published Monthly by San Francisco Art Association
Bulletin Editor ..... MILDRED ROSENTHAL
Associate Editor ..... RALPH STACKPOLE
Contributing Editors ..... WILLIAM B. HESTHAL, RAY BOYNTON
Business Manager ..... PLATT KENT

Send material for Bulletin to San Francisco Art Association, Chestnut and Jones, by 20th of each month

The Bulletin takes pleasure in publishing the following excerpts from two letters recently received:

Berkeley, Calif.

. . . . . .

I will be 75 on the first of May. I enclose my "thinks" for the day which I faintly believe you may like. . . . I enjoy the Bulletin hugely.

. . . . . .

I have been all my life so saturated with Art that today I dislike the sight of an Art magazine. . . .

I walk through an Art Gallery in 5 minutes. Why? To be in search of a Mind. Having discovered him and communed with him, my soul is satisfied. . . .

. . .

We breathe more easily when we know that our feet are resting on the fundamental knowledge that all great truths are simple. So is Art—the Art which we write not with a small a but a lordly, universe-embracing A. But for all the royalty of its lineage, it modestly reserves to itself only two simple laws.

The first is: A work of Art which takes you at once to the great object that it wants to tell and does so without dragging you through the entangled barbs of harassing colors or confusing lines, is the only Art that is great. You may say that the side of a house accomplishes that object as well. I concede that point, if you can tell at once that the building is a jail, a nunnery or a palace of arts.

The second is: A work of Art which does not essay—perhaps futilely, but still with prayerful courage—to elevate you to Paradise, is never, never great Art. To be carried away by novelty or surprised by artisanship, is not Elevation. Curiosity to know how colors are mixed and laid on, is not Elevation. The counting of square feet in a pictured ceiling is not Elevation. Then what is the thing, that in a painting or a statue, takes hold of you by the coat-collar and says "Look at Me"? Neither school, book, nor I, who by seniority am the leading American sculptor, can tell you, unless you, yourself, pull aside the curtain for a moment and look in at the inner consciousness of the Universe.

Having said my little say about this laborious business of all artists, I relapse into my imposed status as a deaf-mute, and I would not exchange my deafness for the runnings to-and-fro of all the museums of San Francisco.

DOUGLAS TILDEN.

---

15 West 67th St., New York.

. . .

I met Arnold Blanche recently.

"Well, well," he greeted me. "Sometimes I am homesick for San Francisco. Lucile is in Florida in the Ringling school. I am putting on a show at the Rehn Gallery."

This on 57th street—in front of the Brummer Gallery where there was a great show of Segonzac—fresh and colorful with some fine pen and ink landscapes. Henry Poore and George Biddle had just closed at Rehn's. Small landscapes of the Hudson river country hung alternately on the walls. They live on opposite sides of the river and there is just that much difference in their point of view.

Henry Poore is the same fellow we used to know. He is interested to know all about his artist friends in San Francisco. His ceramics are superb. Besides bowls and plates he has made two stage sets—think of it—in porcelain. Juliet on her balcony and even a resting actor behind a projecting wing. Also "Ten Nights in a Bar Room"—charming and amusingly up-to-date. . . . . .

The Metropolitan had a summer show of landscapes from Breughel to date. Also a new section of moderns. Los Angeles is certainly up at the top. We can claim Henry Poore.

In Washington Ray Boynton held a fine place in the Corcoran Galleries. There may have been others I did not see in my hurried run through the gallery, but why can't we send wholesale exhibits here to show what fine work San Francisco is doing? Take my word for it, California work is up to and beyond most that we see here of the present day's production.

What gets you in New York is the fact that when you go to an opera or a symphony you know no one. A little desolate at the Philharmonic concert I looked up and saw Piastro—our Piastro—concert master. My loneliness vanished! . . . Kind wishes to my old friends.

Sincerely,

GENEVIEVE RIXFORD SARGEANT.

(Continued from page 3)

loaded with equipment; pots and pans, and crates and cases, as if returning from an annual shopping tour to Peking. The overflow from the baggage racks was piled high in the middle of the floor. There was no room left for legs so we all sat crosslegged, native fashion, on the benches.

From Peking to Nankow the journey was across the plains of northern Chihli, dotted with small flourishing villages and hamlets nestling among willow, poplar, and pogada trees, their beautiful foliage offering pleasant contrast to the barren, treeless regions elsewhere. Beyond Nankow the train crossed the line of the Great Wall and climbing through a pass in a wild mountainous district, it reached the level of the Mongolian Plateau. Here, as far as the eyes could see, the plains, hills and mountains were all alike; dry, barren and treeless, the color of clay. In this setting on the southern edge of the great desert a stop was made at the thriving village of Kalgan, southern terminus of the important caravan routes from cities far to the north in Mongolia.

After several further stops at minor villages, Ta t'ung fu (the city from which the journey to the caves is made) was reached. The train arrived here at 3 in the morning. A bitterly cold piercing wind was blowing down from the north. Without native fur-lined clothes, it penetrated deeply to one's bones, but the pain was deadened by a glorious, clear moonlight night with stars as brilliant as incandescent lights. In a nearby Chinese inn, shelter, warmth and a pot of hot tea were found while waiting for daybreak and the opening of the city gates. Ta t'ung fu is an ancient fortress town which was already known during the Han Dynasty (300 B. C.) and like many of the interior walled-in towns, regularly has its gates locked at night.

Just as the sun was rising, the start was made for the caves in a two-wheeled springless Chinese cart, drawn by two diminutive horses hitched in line. The driver sat sideways on one of the short shafts with his feet dangling over the side. His two passengers sat inside under the low arch of the matted cover with heads bent so as not to poke a hole in the top when going over the very rocky road. I was unable to hold out for more than a few miles of this bouncing and finding walking less fatiguing, I tramped the remaining distance, leaving the cart to carry the luggage. Besides this, winter had arrived here; there was ice on the river and walking helped to keep one warm.

Before mid-day the little hamlet of Yun-kang at the base of the slope in front of the cave-temples was reached. These cave-temples are cut out of a low limestone cliff about half a mile long, facing south. Near the middle where the cliff is the highest are located the largest caves. One of them, protected on the outside by a four-story wooden shelter, contains several gigantic Buddhist statues over sixty feet high. Some of these are painted in brilliant colors. On either side are hundreds of other cave-temples containing thousands of Buddhist statues and decorative carving of fine workmanship. Much of the sculpture, having been executed in outcroppings of soft stone, has suffered from erosion. Many of the figures in more durable stone have been mutilated by vandals or decapitated by treasure-seekers or curio dealers. Two weeks before our arrival an itinerant band of native soldiers camping near the hamlet had used some of the figures for targets. In spite of all this, however, there are still many figures completely intact. At various times since their completion some of the eroded statues have been renovated by building up the forms with plaster and then painting them. Others, that have not suffered erosion, have been recarved or revamped with the changing cultures and styles and in places have been covered with thin layers of plaster or gesso to conform to the new tastes.

Many scholars consider the carvings at Yun-kang to be the finest of Buddhist sculpture in China, if not of all the sculpture in that country. The historians credit the work as a whole to the North Wei period of Chinese history. This was a barbaric dynasty that established its capital at Ta t'ung fu in 398 A.D. The caves were executed from the beginning of the 5th century A. D. to the early part of the 6th century. The North Wei rulers were in constant contact with Khotan in Central Asia (Chinese Turkestan). Khotan in turn owed much of its civilization to the influence of Gandhara (in N. W. India) and Kashmir. In the treatment of the Buddhist images and kind of ornamental designs (e.g., honeysuckles) and presence of capitals peculiar to the Ionian and Corinthian, there may be traced the influence of Gandhara and the Graeco-Bactrian school. North Wei rulers also communicated with Persia, and Sassanian art may have had some share in the development of the style at Yun-kang.

The San Francisco Museum of Art is showing photographs of the Bay Bridge by Peter Stackpole through May 12th.

SAN FRANCISCO ART ASSOCIATION BULLETIN

SECTION 562, P. L. & R.
U. S. POSTAGE
PAID
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF.
PERMIT NO. 3406

Art School Notes

By LEE F. RANDOLPH

On Friday afternoon, May 17th, the Art School will hold its annual reception and exhibition of students' work. All members of the Art Association and their friends are cordially invited. The hours of the reception are two-thirty to six o'clock, there will be music and tea will be served. The exhibition will be open to the public every day except Sundays, from nine to four o'clock.

The school will reopen for the Summer Session, June 24th to August 2nd. The feature subjects for this summer will be courses in Fresco, Lithography and Ceramics, in addition to the regular classes in drawing, painting, design and commercial art.

Our school will participate in the exhibition by schools of the West Coast, opening May 2nd, at The Legion of Honor Museum. The exhibition is sponsored by The Pacific Arts Association.

Sargent Johnson Honored

Sargent Johnson was recently honored by the Alameda County Branch, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, when he was presented with a medal of honor for his sculpture "Forever Free".

He is at present holding an exhibition of sculpture at the Delphic Studios, 724 Fifth Avenue, New York.

Ruth Cravath is holding an Exhibition of Sculpture at the Art Center May 1-15. Garden settings have been arranged by Mrs. Cabot Brown. Otis Oldfield will show his water colors of Telegraph Hill children at the Art Center May 20-June 1.

Two study courses are to be given in the Library of the Museum, beginning May 7th: Tuesday afternoons at 4:00 o'clock, Dr. Grace L. McCann Morley on BACKGROUND OF CONTEMPORARY PAINTING; and Wednesday evenings at 8:00 o'clock, Miss Claudia Davis on FUNDAMENTALS OF ART APPRECIATION. A charge of $2.50 is made for each course.